



# LIBERTY

- ZINE -



## *Losing Christmas*

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WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR SPOUSE ISN'T WELCOME AT HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES.

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# LOSING CHRISTMAS

BY LEAH GREY

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## **In the past five years, the best Christmas I had was the one my husband was in rehab.**

As a child, I cannot begin to tell you what a “Christmas elf” I was. I’m sure it was all on account of my mother, whose sister was tragically killed one Christmas by a drunk driver. Having lost her father only a few years earlier, the blow was beyond devastating to her and my Grandmother. Because Christmas was always a sad time of year for them, both my mother and Grandmother filled their homes with all the Christmas cheer one could muster; right down to the singing Santa head on the wall, who sang a different song each time we squeezed his nose (the adults LOVED that!).

I didn’t understand the grief that loomed behind our Christmas bliss. For me, the holidays meant homemade gingerbread men would be gifted to our neighbours, tobogganing at the old mill, wrapping gifts like Martha Stewart, the hunt for the perfect Christmas tree, productions at church, and of course, sparkling apple cider served in a “fancy” glass at my Grandma’s house. It truly was, “the most wonderful time of the year”.

It stayed that way until I married my husband. Being a single mother who lived on and off with her parents, I had done my best to ensure that Christmas for my son was

the most magical time of the year for him as well. When I married, I only assumed Christmas would be all the more wonderful as I would be able to do the same for my child as my parents did for my brother and I. Gingerbread men. Hot chocolate. Jingle bells. Brady Bunch-style family gatherings.

As Christmas loomed closer in our first year of marriage, it became clear my husband was struggling with what I thought was alcoholism. Things worsened in November and by the time Christmas arrived, it was rocky- to say the least.

The next Christmas, things got much worse. My high expectations for Christmas made everything we went through a lot harder.

*I was devastated my husband had not only ruined my Christmas, but also tainted precious memories for my children.*

First was the year we found out he was an “alcoholic” (which later turned out to be drugs), then year he went missing, then came year he tried to commit suicide, and after that, the year I had to call the police to get into his apartment and see if he had overdosed... not the Christmas memories I wanted for my kids.

In all the awfulness, God gave my family a gift that I would never trade. I learned first-hand the loving way He protects His children in vulnerable situations.

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When I was a single mother I worried constantly about my son, but I now know he will always be taken care of. For children who have lived through a traumatic home life, my children have come out relatively unscathed. In a meeting at my son's school recently, his teacher exclaimed in praise, "He is such a joy to have in the classroom! Honestly, he is such a happy kid!".

### **A happy kid. Even after losing Christmas.**

The way I grew up was wonderful, but my holidays now aren't centered around food or presents. Christmas is about family- a season of togetherness to celebrate the birth of a King. Yes, we like to celebrate with gifts and parties, but that isn't the point.



I don't know what my Christmas will be like this year, but those I care most about in the world will be there. I will not allow anything to get in the way of our Christmas Eve snuggles, while the giggles of excitement trickle down the hallway way past bedtime. I will enjoy the fragrance of cinnamon buns and fresh coffee on Christmas morning and tell my children about the first Christmas, in all its imperfections. Where a boy with humble beginnings was born into a story that has been told a million times over- may there be joy in the world for the Lord.

*"Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people...' - Luke 2:9-10, CSB*

As for my husband, I will continue to pray he changes his role in my Christmas story and contributes to the happy memories our kids have of their childhood. I am ever hopeful for his full recovery because I know God has His hand on my life. After all, God is good and He will be good to me!

In the meantime, if you'll please excuse me, I have a Santa head to find.

*"We know that all things work together[a] for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." -Romans 8:28, CSB*

*\*Update! Two years have passed since I first wrote this article and reading it brings back many emotions. I'd forgotten how hard it was, it feels like another lifetime. Two years isn't all that long, but our lives have changed dramatically since then; my husband's most of all.*

*I have no one but God to credit and thank. I am most humbled by His goodness and faithfulness to our family. If you've ever doubted that recovery is possible- please stop! "...With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mat. 19:26)*

*Boundaries are a must. Don't stay in a dangerous or unhealthy situation by choice. Often, God will work faster when we get out of the way! Pray without ceasing. Love God. Trust God. Follow Jesus. The rest will work itself out.*

# THE GODLY WAY TO GET THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

BY NICHOLE



*"It took all the strength I had, not to fall apart  
Just tryin' hard to mend the pieces of my broken heart  
And I spent oh so many nights just feeling sorry for myself  
I used to cry, but now I hold my head up high  
Oh no, not I, I will survive..."  
I Will Survive, Gloria Gaynor*

Ah, the holidays. The hustle and bustle of the season: all the decorating, food, family, being intentionally thankful, celebrating Jesus, taking time for church, and family.

Did I say, family? Yes, family.

Whether it is your family, your husband's family or dealing with your spouse who is in active addiction or recovery - all of these can pose troubles of their own. Trying to be "normal" can be tough for anyone during the holidays, but throw in addiction and, well, nothing but Jesus and prayer can help sometimes!

If you're having a hard time with managing family dynamics this year, here are eight tips on how to survive the holidays!

## 01 Remember where your help comes from-

King Jesus. He most definitely is our Wonderful Counselor—we can talk to Him about anything. He is our Mighty God, our Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) "Keep your mind fixed on Him and He will give you Peace." Isaiah 26:3

## 03 Pray and listen.

When you talk to God, don't forget to listen to Him, too! Pray continually, for yourself, your spouse, and your family (Philippians 4:6).



## 02 Don't just "survive," overcome!

Jesus has made you an overcomer because He is! Therefore, everyone who has been born of God can overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5). Take hold of your victory by activating your faith; you are a child of God, "You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." 1 John 4:4

## 04 Be thankful, even when it doesn't seem possible.

"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks for everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, CSB. We always have something to be thankful for whether it's our breath, Jesus' love, provision, shelter, or purpose for our pain. To help with an attitude of thanksgiving, consider journaling one thing you are thankful for every day throughout the holidays.

## 05 Be financially smart.

Take time to discuss holiday gifts with others. Be honest! Say you can't participate in gift-giving but would enjoy time together. More low-cost options include dollar gifts or playing Dirty Santa (instructions to follow), DIY gifts, volunteering at a soup kitchen, or pooling your money together to buy a gift for a child in need. Don't forget the fun in homemade decorations; popcorn strings, pine cones, and homemade cards to name a few. My favorite childhood memories were listening to Christmas music and making homemade gifts.

## 06 **Boundaries.**

Have a conversation ahead of time with your family about respecting your wishes and keeping conversations light and joyful. Healthy boundaries with family members are crucial. Help them to understand that while they love you, the holidays are not a time to discuss your husband or his addiction/recovery unless it is positive and encouraging. Alcohol can be a trigger for you or your spouse. It's okay to ask that there be no alcohol involved in the festivities, or discuss with your spouse your concerns if alcohol will be present. You could offer to host an alcohol-free party or gathering at your house. Starting a new holiday tradition may be needed. Instead of planning an elaborate meal, which can be a source of drama or conflict, suggest getting take-out, going out to eat at a restaurant, or hosting a potluck of finger foods. The change in tradition may help everyone take a break from the stress of the holidays. "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Romans 12:18, CSB

## 08 **Practice self-care always**

"Dear friend, I pray that you are prospering in every way and are in good health, just as your whole life is doing well." 3 John 1:2, CSB. It's normal to want to avoid holiday festivities when your home is affected by addiction. Building your confidence and surrounding yourself with people who love and encourage you will help. Go to gatherings or events solo. Or skip it, if you'd rather! Grab coffee with a friend, play music, take a bath, get your nails done, or go for a walk. Make memories by taking your kids, or nieces and nephews, to see Christmas lights in their pj's while drinking hot cocoa. Watch holiday movies, decorate cookies, and don't allow too much on your plate. Choose to REST.

## 07 **Keep realistic expectations.**

While God can do anything, and may use this time for your spouse to find true freedom from addiction, it is wise not to expect a "Christmas miracle." Unfortunately, addiction rarely takes a holiday. Set your intentions and clarify your boundaries. For example, "I am going to be wise about how I handle my spouse. If my husband slips up, I will reaffirm my love for him, but he isn't to be around me or my children until he is substance-free." This may mean not being in the home for the holidays or not addressing difficult situations until the holidays have passed. And remember to also choose to be quick to give praise when your spouse handles a stressful situation well!



Remember, Autumn is a time of thanksgiving and hope when we near the celebration of Jesus' birth. As the cold weather and new year approaches, I pray you trust God so you can know with certainty you will be O.K. Focus on your blessings and be joyful (Romans 12:12). My prayer for you is that the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit this holiday season and in days to come (Romans 15:13).

Dear friend, you will survive and overcome the holidays!  
Love to you and yours this Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year. - Nichole

# HOW TO PLAY DIRTY SANTA



Get your mind out of the gutter, this is a Christian ministry! Actually, to be honest, I think sex is a total gift from God. If you're in a good place in your relationship, be sure to take a moment to tell "Santa" what you want for Christmas.

Unfortunately, this is another kind of game we're talking about today. One that works whether your spouse is super awesome and sexy, or perhaps, not even there at all.

If money is tight this year, this is a fun way to do family gifts. Plus, it's a lot easier than trying to find that "perfect thing" for each person! Between stockings hung with care, stuffed turkeys, and ugly Christmas sweaters, we know the holidays can take a financial toll.

But now that you'll know how to play Dirty Santa, you're about to **BRING THE FUN.**

# THE RULES

## 1

### Set a budget.

The average is (\$10-\$25) and each person brings their wrapped gift and piles it in the center of the room.

## 2

### Draw a number.

Write numbers on slips of paper equaling the number of gifts available and have each person randomly choose a number.

## 3

### Let's play!

Player #1 goes first (that wasn't obvious, was it?). They choose a gift from the table, and open it.

## 4

### Steal or keep?

Player #2 can choose to steal the gift from Player #1, or open a new gift. If Player #2 steals from Player #1, then Player #1 chooses a new gift.

## 5

### Continue in number order

Go around the circle until all the gifts have been opened. Read the rules below to keep the game fair, but feel free to make your own variation!

#### Additional Gameplay Rules:

- Only three steals per item. Once it has been taken three times, it stays with the third person and can't be stolen anymore. Score!
- Only three steals per person. Three steals and after that you get to keep what you have. Use this strategically to your advantage. Think, poker face.
- Three owns and it's yours. If you get a gift three times, it's yours for good.



# DADDY DEAREST SAID, "NO"

What to do when your spouse is not  
welcome to holiday festivities.

BY LEAH GREY

I will never forget the first time I went to Europe. Not to start off my story like, "Hey! I'm a rich snot who went to Europe, I know your Christmas sucks, but don't worry about it, let me tell you about Paris." No, that's not it at all. Nor is it how it happened.

My brother, the Hipster, went backpacking across Europe while his girlfriend at the time went to Australia to spread her wings. Long story short, my brother met a Belgian girl. His girlfriend never returned from Australia (who can blame her?! Sunshine, beaches, Koala Bears), and my brother moved to Europe.

We had never visited, for obvious reasons. My parents really wanted us to visit my brother and meet his new love's family. So we made plans to go as a family to Belgium for Christmas the following year.

While we were supposed to be saving money to go, my life was crashing down around me as my husband's addiction progressed from, "You have a problem," to, "You need to go back to rehab." I wasn't sure how we would ever get to Europe at that point, but it didn't matter. If we couldn't go, then that was okay. At least my husband would be sober.

If you know my story, you may have read before about what happened next, but I'll give you the short version anyway. My husband left rehab in Canada early, took a bunch of our savings and went back to New York after calling an ambulance and leaving me on the floor mid-panic attack with my parents and paramedics.

*Oh, and he went to a baseball game on the way.*

That was September. By October, I saw a lawyer and drew up separation papers. By November, we discussed our reconciliation. By December, we purchased a house in New Jersey.

Despite my willingness to forgive my husband and move on, my family was not having it. My parents told me that if I went back to him and tried to come back home again, they would close the door. Setting their boundaries! They couldn't take watching me cry my eyes out for weeks on end in my sweatpants one more time.

Shortly before my husband left rehab and all was sunny and bright, my parents had planned and purchased our family trip. But after my husband left us, my father refused to allow my husband to join us. My father could

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not forgive my husband that fast, and I don't blame him. The only problem was that our trip was planned for Christmas.

Much had transpired between me, my parents and my husband until that point. My dad had never even really yelled at my husband until the day he left. Despite the terrible things my husband had done to us, my parents had tried to be very loving, forgiving, and understanding. Which was made especially difficult because they really didn't want me to marry my husband in the first place. And they didn't come to the wedding because we eloped. Not exactly "getting off on the right foot," if you know what I mean.

### **So when my dad refused to allow my husband to come on our trip, it made me sad, but I understood.**

My husband, on the other hand, didn't seem to care if we spent Christmas with him or not. He was going to California for work training, and I had offered to give up our trip and take the kids to meet him there instead-but he refused. To date, that Christmas is the worst I have ever had, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

I had a choice to make- did I join my family or join my husband?

*"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*  
Genesis 2:24, KJV

Do you know that verse? "To cleave" means, "to adhere firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly," Here's the same verse in another translation,

*"This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife in such a way that the two become one person." (TLB)*

This could be interpreted that I needed to chase my husband, the leader of our household, wherever his sins took him, but I disagree. That's not wise, no matter how you look at it.

My husband left me, so we were not "one person" at that point. He ripped my heart out! Why would I leave my support network to chase someone who wasn't honouring me?

*"But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace." 1 Corinthians 7:15, CSB*

The peaceful decision was not to follow my husband, who was still living in chaos. I was not bound, so with two young children, off I went!

#thisisantwerp  
**GOEDEMORGEN,  
ANTWERPEN.**

Europe was all that I imagined it to be and more. I made a plea to go to France, so we went there as well.

*Bonjour, Paris, j'arrive!*

Although I was worried about my husband, I tried to enjoy myself. Everything was wonderful until Christmas Eve.

Being six hours ahead of my husband while he was in Jersey, and nine when he was in California, meant we weren't talking often. I didn't worry much about it and figured he was busy with his training, catching up on his sleep from the time change, the usual reasons. In the back of my mind, I was terrified he'd slipped back into addiction. I told Satan to get out of my head and carried on.

By dinnertime on Christmas Eve, I still hadn't heard from my husband. We were travelling to the South of Belgium to visit my now sister-in-law's family as they were making us dinner (and what a fantastic dinner it was!). I didn't want to keep leaving the festivities or make a scene. My parents were getting increasingly worried my husband had not so much as called the children to say Merry Christmas, to which I kept making excuses.

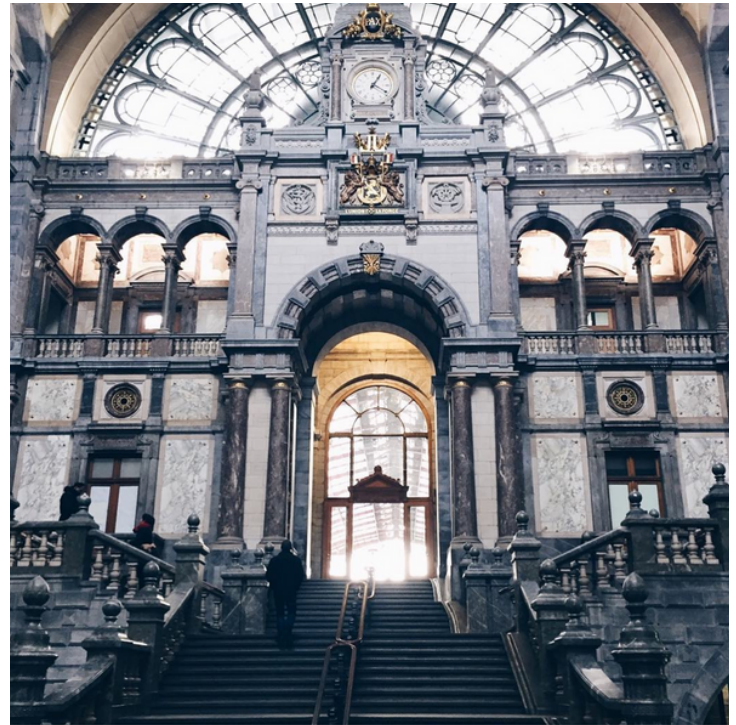
It was embarrassing, anyway.

***“Hello, nice to meet you. I’m the sister and my family is a hot mess. I live with my parents. I hope your family isn’t normal so I don’t look like Canadian-American trailer trash in bad shoes.”***

Hours later, after I had exhausted my husband's friends, family, relatives and hospital numbers, I called the police to break into his apartment. I was sure he was dead.

After the police showed up, he called. He was alive. Which was virtually all he said after getting angry and calling me irrational. He promised to call the children the next day, blamed it on jet lag, and I was left wondering if I was a lunatic.

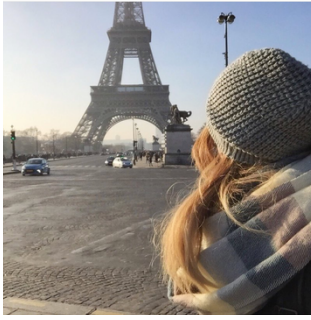
The next day, he didn't call the children. Merry Christmas. I lied and said he did.



Centraal Station, Antwerp, Belgium



My brother, chef at Dôme sur Mer



The Eiffel Tower



Lovely view of Parisian life



Meir, Antwerp shopping district



Restaurant area near Centraal Station

Although I had my suspicions, it wasn't until about six months later that I found out what had really happened on Christmas. Things I don't dare write about for fear that if I speak them aloud, the hurt will resurface, and I will not be able to look at him the same for weeks on end. It was the best trip and the worst Christmas I had ever had.

In the end, I am glad I went on the trip alone and would do it again in a heartbeat.

**My father's, "No," was the best thing that had happened to me in the entire time my husband faced his demons because it showed me my life could be a product of my own choices- not my husband's.**

Had I followed my husband, I would have been left prey to his choices. We likely still would have had a terrible Christmas, but because I chose my own path, I got to do something incredible; I built relationships with my new family and made memories I will keep for the rest of my life.

If you're stuck during the holidays with an uninvited or unwelcome, spouse, don't let this friction scare you. Take a moment and figure out what's best for you this Christmas and choose your own path. Your loved one made their choices, it is their responsibility to deal with it now, not yours.

Remember, you are not your husband's mediator. His relationship with your family is his and theirs, they will work it out.

Much later, when my husband was in long-term recovery, there were times I chose to stay and support my husband and missed out on things I wanted to do. At that point, it felt right to help my husband. He wasn't suffering consequences of bad choices, instead, he was trying but struggling to make good ones.

In my experience, following God with full abandon has always been the best path. Where does God want to take you? If you do not go, you will never know.

*"For I know the plans I have for you"—this is the Lord's declaration—"plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11, CSB*

If your earthly "father" says, "No," then go with God's, "Yes."

Conflict resolved!

# Break Up With Your Bad Boundaries.

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by Leah Grey



## *What's Next?*

Has anyone ever told you that you're "codependent"? Find out why I believe codependency is a label, and not a diagnosis, in my virtual class *Break Up With Your Bad Boundaries*.

↳ <https://leahgrey.com/shop/break-up-with-your-bad-boundaries>

**WHY, LIBERTY?**

**“I am not free  
while any  
woman is unfree,  
even when her  
shackles are very  
different from  
my own.”**  
**— audre lorde**

*Liberty means freedom.*

This freedom liberty refers to, it means that we have the right to choose. We can choose who we work for, what we wear, where we shop, and what we watch on television.

When addiction hits a family our ability to choose is frozen and with it our freedom. I created this platform to provide hope, support and encouragement to the family members of those struggling with addiction. If every woman who crossed my virtual threshold left feeling liberated, I would feel like I reached my goal.

So, liberty? It is everything.

*Also, I got all my hopes and dreams  
crushed in New York so you know, it's a  
theme.*

